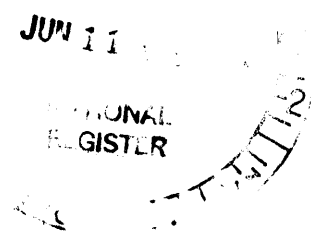


1. HOTEL RUSSEL ERSKINE
123 West Clinton Avenue

Russel Erskine Properties
Harvey B. Morris, et al
604 Madison Street
Huntsville, Alabama 35801



Lot 1, Block 17, Old Town; 114.5' (Clinton) X 137.5' (Gallatin)
16 537780 3843050

1928-30: Joe Holman of Marr and Holman, Nashville, architect
E. G. Holiday, Nashville and Birmingham, contractor
Hutchens Company, Huntsville, mechanical contractor

DESCRIPTION

The Russel Erskine is a twelve-story hotel of concrete and steel construction. Located at the corner of Clinton and Gallatin, it is rectangular in shape with a one-story dining room wing to the south and another one-story wing containing shops along Clinton. The shaft is sheathed with dark red brick and divided into alternating single and double window bays. A shallow molding separates the top two floors which continue the same fenestration but are faced with light ashlar. A high parapet runs around the top having a void at each corner filled with balusters and accented by finials.

The base is also of ashlar with a central entrance under a metal canopy and there are display windows on either side. The dining room wall along Gallatin features a single row of large round-topped windows. Beneath the dining room is a basement garage. The hotel has a lobby, coffee shop, banquet rooms, and about 130 guest rooms, each of which were equipped with a radio speaker. In 1954 the entire building was air conditioned. An enormous electric sign on the flat roof identifies the hotel. It ceased operation in 1975 and has been vacant since then.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Russel Erskine was considered a most magnificent structure in its day, which was the middle of the Depression. It was the tallest hotel and had the most rooms in the Tennessee Valley; it was "the" place to stay when one had business in North Alabama. At its opening in January, 1930, the management threw a formal ball attended by all the prominent families of the area. For thirty years most of the civic clubs used its meeting rooms and all important social functions occurred within its walls.

The money for its construction was put up by a group of Huntsville businessmen who incorporated in February, 1928, and construction began late that year. Although the architect and general contractor were from outside Huntsville, the directors were proud that many local firms had subcontracts, including the Huntsville Transfer and

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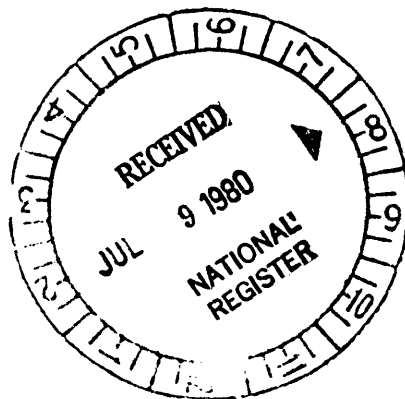
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Building Material Company which supplied sand, gravel and brick, and Mason's Furniture store which supplied three carloads of furniture. However, the tile, marble, and terrazzo work went to an Atlanta firm, and a Birmingham company did the painting. It had Otis elevators. The total cost of the hotel was over half a million dollars.

The hotel was named for a local man, Russel Erskine, who had left Huntsville at an early age and made a great success of himself by becoming president of the Studebaker Corporation. He was a descendant of two old Huntsville families, the Russel's and the Erskine's, and although he was unable to attend the grand opening ball, his family were the honored guests.

The Meyer Hotel Company managed the business until 1935. The hotel survived the Depression years, and by the 1940s was turning a profit. There was a boom when the missile program moved to Huntsville in the 1950s, but the sudden resultant growth of the city during the 1960s created a rash of motel building that drew customers away from the, by then, old building. During the 1970s, an attempt was made to revive the hotel, but it failed and the structure is now vacant. New owners currently are considering various possible new uses for the hotel.

The Russel Erskine played a major role in Huntsville's recent history and is locally significant as being the last tall building from the 1920s and the only one of these in the Neo-Classical Revival style.



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